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ABSTRACT

A recent trend in composition studies has been a call for the "feminization" of composition pedagogy. Collaborative learning pedagogues have sought to reconstruct the classroom as a site of social cooperation, connectedness, and nurturance and have re-envisioned composition as an act of understanding rather than of agonistics. Reconstituting the composition classroom as the site of maternal care merely insidiously reterritorializes power relations--the specific power relations of mother and child, public and private, master and servant. The problem with current critical theories and pedagogies (maternal pedagogies included), according to Jean Baudrillard, is that the critical spirit has found there a comfortable place to retire and has thus lost its revolutionary potential. Jean Baudrillard offers a paratheory of the invention of the writing Self--an ironic self who maintains a distance from Truth and all other totalizing theories of unity and community: in place of the banality of "love," he offers seduction; in place of the subject, he offers the object; in place of a pathos of consensus, he offers a Neitzschian pathos of distance. Baudrillard's strategies offer the possiblity of breaking up the tyranny of Truth, Being, and Identity which has held us hostage and of opening up a space in which fatal, as opposed to maternal pedagogies, could be challenged to appear. (SAM)

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Composition: What's Love Got to Do with It?

A recent trend in composition studies, instigated by gender, social, and political concerns, has been a call for the "feminization" of composition pedagogy. Working against traditional male-gendered rhetorical models and bolstered by Rogerian rhetoric, social-constructionist bases, and the moral psychology studies of Carol Gilligan, Mary Belenky et al., collaborative learning pedagogues have sought to reconstruct the classroom as a site of social cooperation, connectedness, and nurturance, and have re-envisioned composition as an act of understanding rather than of agonistics. Sally Gearhart in "The Womanization of Rhetoric," for example, characterizes this new classroom as a "womblike matrix" (199)--that is, a "dialogic context for [the] exchange of ideas" (Jarrratt 107). Catherine Lamb argues that the feminist composition classroom would foster negotiation, mediation, and resolution, by practicing what Sara Ruddick calls "Maternal Thinking"--that is, attentive love. The goal of such pedagogues appears to be to return to the Mother "as the embodiment of [the] idealized virtues of forbearance, fortitude, care, and patience" (Ainley 53).

I would like to address the efficacy and ethics of such a goal, of realigning "the figure of woman as mother" as a new, liberating, equalizing, paradigm for ethical relations--either between writer and reader, or teacher and student. Is such a pedagogy--coined "gynagogy" by some (*Struggle* 3)--truly an empowering model? Is "love," a mother's love--in particular, a viable *techne* for

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liberation? It is my argument that, on the contrary, love--a mother's love in particular--prescribes a set of relations and a process of subject constitution which insiduously re-invoke Western, metaphysical, political, and patriarchal traditions. Not only does this mother's love paradigm secure the traditional relations within the so-called nuclear family but it also secures the Oedipal construction of consciousness and conscience, as well as perpetuating the master/slave dialectic that sustains subjectivity.

According to Lamb, the goal and methodology of a patently feminist composition pedagogy should counter "monologic" forms of argumentation by emphasizing the supposedly maternal skills of negotiation and mediation which will culminate in a "resolution of conflict that is fair to both sides" (11)--a resolution which will *lessen the distance* between the parties via "loving attention" or empathy which suspends any existing hierarchy (15) and thereby guarantees a "mutual recognition."[1] Such a pedagogy obviously has its foundation in the processes of collaborative learning-- "the process of intellectual negotiation and collective decision-making" with the aim of reaching "consensus through an expanding conversation" (Trimbur 602).

The danger of such a consensus-seeking pedagogy is its potential to glorify the discursive production of knowledge while ignoring--according to Greg Myers-- "how knowledge and its means of production are distributed in an unequal, exclusionary social order and embedded in hierarchical relations of power" (Trimbur 603). John Trimbur concurs with this critique but nevertheless retains his Habermasian hope in the potentiality of public discourse. He

[1]It is interesting to note that the criticisms leveled against Lamb's article after it appeared were focused almost exclusively on her failure to properly acknowledge where such notions of collaboration and dialogic originated. That is, she was criticized for not properly charting her ideas' lineage and paternity--for not legitimating her argument with the names of the fathers: Booth, Burke, Perelman.

appropriates Victor Vitanza's notion of a rhetoric of *dissensus* , and argues that intellectual negotiation and discourse should aim for revealing differences, rather than solidifying identifications. This demand for maintaining difference is an extraordinarily significant one. For what are normalized, consensual, discourse communities but a community of peers who have been accepted into that community only in so far as they have abandoned their differences--only in so far as they have accepted the status quo of that community: its language, its discourse, its values? What differences have been sacrificed to attain consensus? And whose voices have been silenced through consensus? This is Susan Jarratt's argument in "Feminism and Composition: A Case for Conflict." She writes, "For some composition teachers, creating a supportive climate in the classroom and validating student experience leads them to avoid conflict [and] . . . leaves them insufficiently prepared to negotiate the oppressive [and silencing] discourses of racism, sexism, and classism" (106).

Such a classroom seems to perpetuate the American cultural myth of of a mother country with outstretched, loving arms, guaranteeing opportunity and equality for all. This is the myth of the melting pot: that is, putting students in collaborative relations is like putting a bowl of Velveeta Cheese and Salsa in the microwave to create a delightful dish to be consumed. **There is value** in sustaining conflict and encouraging differences. To strive for consensus is a problematic endeavor and ideal, but to seek consensus in the name of the mother is even more so. It is my argument that essentializing and re-idealizing the so-called "maternal" love instincts and nurturing capacities potentially blinds us to the power of the mother, to the hierarchical relationship between mother and child, and to her gendered and trained *incapacities* . Didn't Carol Gilligan remind us that it is women's special knack **not to resolve conflict**, but to **avoid** it altogether? What does a mother's lullaby serve but to **silence** the disgruntled

child's cry? And if mothers are so well-versed in conflict resolution, then why was my mother always deferring negotiation, by telling us to "just wait until your father comes home."

What disturbs me is that proponents of "gynagogy," "maternal thinking," and "nurturing classrooms" often justify their positions via the rhetoric of victimage. They seem to suggest that there exists an original, innocent "feminine realm [that has been] corrupted by phallic" evil (Benjamin 223). The advantages of such a rhetoric are many and obvious. First, it provides them with a sense of moral orthodoxy. Secondly, it propels them with a sense of a special mission and destiny. Thirdly, it vouchsafes a superior insight and more illuminating subject position (King). Ruddick, for example, argues that a "feminist standpoint" is "a superior vision" (qtd. in Lamb 16). It is Ruddick's argument that this moral superiority has been gained at the price of oppression and victimization. This process of casting one's self as victim and then claiming moral superiority is a powerful justification for victimizing others. Most well-known histories of our American frontier, for example, cast the pioneer as the victim of natural forces and Indian savagery. Such innocence and victimization justifies "Manifest Destiny": the "taming" of the West and the brutal acts of genocide against the Native American population. My point: claiming innocence is never innocent.

Christiane Olivier in *Jocasta's Children* offers a corrective to this rhetoric of innocence and victimage by suggesting that Jocasta--the mother in our Oedipal narrative--is perhaps guiltier than Oedipus himself (2). Estela Welldon, in *Mother, Madonna, Whore: The Idealization and Denigration of Motherhood*, likewise dismisses the mother's natural innocence. She writes:

> It looks as though we have all become silent conspirators in a system which, from whatever angle we look at them, women are either

> dispossessed of all power or made . . . sexual objects and victims . . . . We do not accord them any sense of responsibility for their own unique functions, deeply related to fecundity and motherhood, and liable at times to manifest themselves perversely. Why should Jocasta, when both she and Oedipus learn the facts of their incestuous relationship, be the one to promptly commit suicide? (86)

Olivier argues that--beyond Jocasta and Oedipus--it is the mother's love that has constituted our patriarchal society as such, and warns that "the spider's web that [mothers] have woven around the little boy is the very web" in which we find ourselves--as women--trapped (89). Now, it is not my purpose to cast blame nor to demand guilt, but rather to acknowledge woman's--the mother's in particular--profound complicity in systems of domination and oppression. Jessica Benjamin writes, "to reduce domination to a simple relation of doer and done-to is to substitute moral outrage for analysis. Such a simplification, moreover, reproduces the structure of gender polarity under the guise of attacking it" (9-10).

Furthermore, it is my purpose to acknowledge the mother as a neither innocent nor guilty, but as an*active* agent of a child's subject constitution. It is the very relation to the mother--in our Western culture--that constitutes a child's gendered subjectivity as such (see Olivier 86). In terms of the Oedipal model of development, Benjamin reminds us, "all infants [initially] feel themselves to be like their mothers. But boys discover that they cannot grow up to *become* her; they can only *have* her. . . . Male children achieve their masculinity by denying their original identification or oneness with their mothers" ( ) and by denying and denigrating "the feminine." Girls, on the other hand, "gain a sense of self by protecting the all-good, all-powerful maternal object, at the price of compliance. She becomes unable to distinguish what she wants from what mother wants.

The fear of separation and difference has been transposed into submission" (Benjamin 79).

The relation to the mother, then, is tinged with fear and an infantile acknowledgement of the power inequities within that relation. Furthermore, that fear is exacerbated by the fact that the mother's love is itself not distributed evenly or "democratically." Olivier states that "Girls are for the most part weaned earlier than boys. Mothers stop giving the bottle to girls, on average, in the twelfth month, and to boys in the fifteenth. The feed is longer for boys: at two months, forty-five minutes, against twenty-five minutes for girls" (54). Now we see that within this idealized mother/child relationship, this nurturing love, there exists inequities and sexism. It is this inequity, this unequal distribution of the mother's milk, that instills in women a sense of oral desperation that becomes sublimated into "love." Olivier writes:

> And so [this] excess of "emptiness" and desire for "fullness" will take the woman into the kitchen where she will take up her position somewhere between the fridge and the cooker, by way of the sink. . . . [S]he will be told that this is the place that has been planned for her since the dawn of time, that this is her kingdom. . . . What a sham it is, what an infernal circle, in which mothers provide for whole families so that, by this round-about route, they can feed the hungry little girl they carry inside them! . . . By the mechanism of projection, each woman imagines that everyone else is like her and therefore famished, and, herself insatiable, feels obliged to feed them till they can eat no more. In the lives of women an unprotected, empty inside cohabits strangely with a generous outside. Women, it seems, tend to mix up "loving" and "feeding." (56)

Women love only because they have been *loved*--that is, left for nothing, as nothing. Denied their clitoral identity and thus not yet able to identify with the

reproducing vaginal mother, girls were/are nothing for the first twelve to thirteen years of their life. *This* , then, is a mother's love. I am reminded of Kenneth Burke's acknowledgement that a shepherd will love, nurture, care for, and act in the best interest of the sheep. But he or she may very well be raising them for market--to be bought, sold, (and slaughtered) as commodities. These commodities will serve the *polis* as gendered subjects who will faithfully reproduce the family structure, *ad nauseum*, that very family structure which creates misogynist men and submissive women. Is the idealization of the mother another example of the conservative backlash against women? Is this mother truly the one who will lead us out of Egypt? Is this truly the emancipatory pedagogy we have been waiting for?

If Freud is correct in asserting that our primary relations determine our subsequent relations, then we must question how maternal pedagogues avoid merely reinscribing within the composition classroom the same set of relations that each student had to his or to her mother. If gynagogy proposes to deconstruct traditional hierarchical and phallic relations between student and teacher--that is, by attempting to disperse the teacher's authority while "empowering" students--how can they counteract or disperse the very real and threatening power of the mother? How can proponents of a nurturing classroom apologize for the mother's power and desire? For behind the nurturing mother, lies the threats of being engulfed by her and of being denied her love. Just because our freshman composition students have survived high school, it doesn't mean they have survived the oedipal relation and are able to deal with their ambivalent feelings toward the mother.

Reconstituting the composition classroom as a site of maternal care, merely insiduously reterritorializes power relations--the specific power relations of mother and child, public and private, master and servant. Jim Corder in

"Argument as Emergence, Rhetoric as Love" argues that in order to understand we have "*to know* each other, *to be present to* each other, *to embrace* each other." It is just such a love that describes the Hegelian, **negating** process of Subject constitution. It is just such a love that demands *stasis* and control, that in Baudrillard's words murders the other--the object of love (for in love the other is always objectified). And it is in this sense that language, likewise, becomes an object of *love*---that is, "embraced" in a relation of mastery.

In order for there to be consensual truth and "socially justified belief" negotiated via "critical understanding"--as maternal thinkers propound, one must assume that language is primarily rational and communicative--that is, *controllable* and *predictable* , otherwise, how could "consensus" be attained? The communicative theory propounded by Jurgen Habermas demonstrates this fundamental belief as he advocates a critical rationalism, a totalizing, universal pragmatics of the "universal conditions of possible understanding" in discursive practices, that is, in "ideal speech acts" (*Communication* 1). For Habermas, human beings speak, they negotiate language; language does not negotiate them. Thus Habermas's universal pragmatics require a notion of Subjectivity that begs the question of liberation, understanding, and subject production, just as the notion of maternal care begs the question of gender production.

Is there, then, another model? It is my argument that an ethical pedagogical practice would embrace ***mis****understanding* and ambiguity. Such a practice can sustain a discourse community of difference without reproducing in the classroom the master/slave relationship that goes by the name of love.

The problem with current critical theories and pedagogies--maternal pedagogies included, according to Baudrillard, is that "the critical spirit has found its summer home in socialism" (*Fatal* 190). That is, the critical spirit has found a comfortable site to retire: in the production of socialized subjects, and

has thus lost its revolutionary potential. Baudrillard argues that critical theories as practiced remain unchallenging because these theoretical strategies emanate from the Subject "and are posed with all the assumptions of the superiority of the subject in its apparent mastery of the world" (Gane 174)--a subject situated within, in Mike Gane's words, "a cozy world of dialogue[,] human communication . . . [and] rational understanding" (65)--all banal rhetorical strategies exemplified by Habermas. But, a fatal theory, on the other hand, assumes that the subject *as object* and language as trace are more subtle, more ingenious, more *ironic* than the subject (174) or than rhetoric as communication or persuasion, and thus is the only possible strategy left to us that has any chance of subverting modernism's logic and its will to produce and represent.

Baudrillard explains that the term fatal has nothing fatalistic or apocalyptic about it (87). Rather, the fatal is situated between the determined and the aleatory. In this way--by not setting up a Rational/Irrational dichotomy, Baudrillard escapes the traps of binary-thinking and the Aristotelian first-principle of non-contradiction. Fatal relations suggest that things or words are indeed linked--but perhaps not rationally as our Subjectivity has supposed us to assume. But rather, things or words are linked *contiguously* , not causally. By employing fatal strategies, Baudrillard's writing challenges these radically contiguous linkages, following them as far as he can go, in order to participate in what might appear.

As he writes, he encourages "sites of emergence--events, pointed remarks, dream-like flashes of wit, or *witz* . . . . [or] the trace . . . : not a meta-language organised around signs, bur rather a sort of tracking shot along the line of traces. When this occurs there is no continuity as a rule, and everything begins to move quite quickly" (*Revenge* 24). This is a writing whose speed surpasses the consumptive appetite of abstractions, concepts, and reasons. This is a radically

different view of language and writing than espoused by such social-epistemics as Habermas. Of this difference, Baudrillard writes,

> By definition, communication simply brings about a relationship between things already in existence. It doesn't make things appear. And what is more, it tries to establish an equilibrium--the message and all that. Yet it seems to me that there is a more exciting way of making things appear: not exactly communication, but something more of the order of challenge. (*Revenge* 24-5)

Communication--with its demands of identification and equilibrium--is symptomatic of the *pathos of modernity*, charged with the whole ideology of liberation and free circulation (*Fatal Strategies* 105). Communication, like love, is a demand: "love me; recognize me" and thus remains *a fetal strategy.*, a *pathos* of unity and consensus.

In contradistinction to the *pathos* of modernity, Baudrillard invokes Nietzsche's concept of a *pathos of distance*. In *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche defines the *pathos of distance* as the ingrained difference between strata and as a craving for an ever new widening of distances, including distances *within the self* itself--a process of self-overcoming. The *pathos of distance* lies in contradistinction to the notion of community has heretofore been defined--that is, as total identity (e.g., Habermas and Aristotle). A *pathos of distance* is not based on consensus *nor* on the collapse of difference. But rather, a *pathos of distance* is a paratheory of the invention of the self who maintains a reversible and uncertain relation to identity, by establishing an ironic distance from the Other (the dialectical, negating, synthesizing, sublimating Other), *and* from the Self, remaining always already two-faced, two-fold--stretching the distance of distance.

The challenge that fatal strategies propose is uncertainty and reversibility in gender and genre. This reversibility is not, however, to be taken as the

dialectical negative. As we have seen, the negative sustains the positive. The reversible form is what according to Baudrillard "abolishes the differential opposition" (12). He writes, "every *positive* form can accommodate itself to its negative form, but understands the challenge of the *reversible* form as mortal. Every structure can adapt to its subversion or inversion, but not to the reversion of its terms" (21). Such a reversion absorbs Truth, Representation, and Referentiality.

Baudrillard is offering, in effect, a paratheory of the invention of the writing Self--an ironic self who immersed in the instability of language maintains a distance from Truth and all other totalizing theories of unity and community--as, in Victor Vitanza's words, an "'art' of 'resisting and disrupting' the available means (that is, the cultural codes) that allow for persuasion and identification: the 'art' of not only refusing the available (capitalistic/socialist) codes but also of refusing altogether to recode, or to reterritorialize power relations" ("'Some More' Notes" 133). Indeed, Baudrillard is offering a radical alternative: in place of liberatory theories he suggests fatal theories, in place of the banality of "love" he offers seduction, in place of the Subject he offers the object, in place of a *pathos* of consensus he offers a Nietzschian *pathos* of distance. Thus fatal strategies offer the possibility of breaking up the tyranny of Truth, Being, and Identity which has held us hostage and of opening up a space in which would could challenge fatal--in contradistinction to maternal--pedagogies to appear.

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